

While Asian American/Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the country, there remains a serious lack of data that offers an accurate picture of the issues.¹ Primary health, housing, employment, education, economic status, acculturation, immigration, legal issues, etc. all impact one's emotional well being, yet hard data on the mental health status of AAPIs are difficult to find. Stigma, limited English proficiency and different cultural norms about what constitutes appropriate mental health interventions make it difficult to ascertain the prevalence of mental illness among AAPIs.² This Fact Sheet provides a sample of available data in an effort to offer a brief overview of issues facing AAPIs in this country.

ISSUE:

AAPI youth are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems.

- ◆ API females consistently have the highest suicide rate of females between the ages of 15-24.³
- ◆ 30% of Asian American girls in grade 5 through 12 reported depressive symptoms as compared to Non-Hispanic White (22%), Africa American (17%) or Hispanic (27%).⁴
- ◆ Every 7 hours an Asian American child is arrested for a violent crime.
- ◆ In the City of Westminster in Orange county, CA approximately 17% of all juvenile delinquency and 48% of all Asian delinquency involve Asian gangs.⁶

ISSUE:

- ◆ Pacific Islanders are at increased risk for serious emotional problems and other related problems.
- ◆ Native Hawaiian youth have significantly higher rates of suicide attempts than other adolescents in Hawaii.⁷
- ◆ Six-month prevalence rate of major depression among Hawaiian youth was found to be 8.5%.⁷
- ◆ Methamphetamine smoking in Guam is now generally accepted as an epidemic.⁸

ISSUE:

- ◆ Southeast Asians are at particular risk for serious emotional/behavioral problems.
- ◆ 40% of Southeast Asian refugees suffer from depression, 35% from anxiety, and 14% from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁹
- ◆ 53.1% of Hmongs, 40.8% of Cambodians and 32.6% of Laotians have household incomes of less than \$15,000 compared to Non-Hispanic Whites at 21.6%.¹⁰

- ◆ There are approximately 15,000 Asian street gang members in California, mostly Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian or Hmong, with an increase in Asian females.¹¹

ISSUE:

- ◆ Domestic violence is an increasingly serious problem in the AA/PI communities affecting both woman and children.
- ◆ In a report on domestic violence in Massachusetts, 39% of the Vietnamese respondents and 47% of Cambodian respondents reported that they know a woman who has been physically abused or injured by her partner.¹²

ISSUE:

- ◆ Asian American elderly experience serious mental health problems.
- ◆ Asian American elders show a greater prevalence of dementia than the general population.¹³
- ◆ The suicide rate among Chinese American elderly women has been found to be 10 times higher than for White elderly women.¹³

ISSUE:

- ◆ Utilization rates for mental health services among AAPIs are low.
- ◆ Controlling for lifetime prevalence of mental illness, Asian Americans are less likely to use mental health services than White Americans.¹⁴
- ◆ AAPIs frequently somatize their problems, preferring to go to their primary care physician rather than seek help from a mental health clinician. In Seattle, up to one half of all visits to primary care physicians are due to conditions caused by or exacerbated by mental or emotional problems.¹⁴

Challenges to the field

FACT:

There continues to be a lack of accurate data, evaluation and research on AAPIs.

Challenge:

- ◆ Collect and disaggregate data that will give an accurate account of differences between the various ethnic groups.

- ◆ Conduct evaluation and research specific to AAIP populations utilizing appropriate outcome measures and evaluation instruments.

FACT:

There is a lack of trained bi-lingual/bi-cultural personnel.

Challenge:

- ◆ Increase the number of trained bi-lingual paraprofessionals.
- ◆ Train human service professionals and others working with AAPI populations on providing culturally appropriate mental health services.

FACT:

AAPIs are a diverse population requiring culturally appropriate intervention strategies.

Challenge:

Identify, develop and implement intervention strategies which appropriately address gender, ethnicity, age, regional and generational differences. This includes looking at Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, youth, elders, females and those living in areas with limited AAPI resources.

Integrate mental health and primary health care services

FACT:

AAPIs remain a silent voice in the mental health arena.

Challenge:

Increase involvement of consumers and family members at all levels of program design, implementation, evaluation, training and advocacy efforts.

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